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HUMAN RIGHTS SUB-COMMISSION CONCLUDES DEBATE ON QUESTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN ALL COUNTRIES

Sub-Commission Also Begins Review of Slavery and Slavery-like Practices

GENEVA, 22 August (UN Information Service) -- The Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities this afternoon concluded its review of human rights violations in all countries, after hearing statements by 16 experts, observers from 14 States, representatives from 15 non-governmental organizations, and a representative of a national liberation movement in the two-day discussion.

The expert from Syria made a statement at this afternoon's meeting, as did observers from Indonesia, Portugal, India, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Cuba, Pakistan, Israel, Japan and Iran.

The representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) also made a statement.

At this afternoon's meeting, the Sub-Commission also began its review of slavery and the slave trade in all practices and manifestations, including tne slavery-like practices of apartheid and colonialism.

For this review, the Sub-Commission has before it the report of its Working Group on Slavery and Slavery-Like Practices. Recommendations set out in its report include a proposal that the name of the Working Group be reformulated to read "Working Group against Slavery, Apartheid, Gross Human Exploitation and Human Degradation".

Experts from Syria, India, Norway and Iraq spoke on this topic after it was introduced by the Chairman of the Working Group.

Representatives of the African National Congress (ANC), the Anti-Slavery Society, the International Federation of Abolitionists, and the World Conference for Religion and Peace also spoke. Observers from the Federal Republic of Germany and Iran made statements.

Finally this afternoon, the Sub-Commission heard an announcement that the 11-day period beginning 14 January 1984 had been agreed on as a date for an

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official visit by two Sub-Commission members to Mauritania to verify that country's efforts to abolish slavery and the slave trade, and to ascertain its needs in foreign aid in this field.

The invitation for this visit had been extended to the Sub-Commission by the Government of Mauritania in 1981 and was renewed earlier this month. The two Sub-Commission members designated to undertake the visit are Marc Bossuyt, expert from Belgium, and Mohamed Yousif Mudawi, expert from the Sudan.

Debate on Human Rights Violations

NOEGROHO WISNOEMOERTI, observer from Indonesia, referring to the situation in East Timor, said the right of the people there had been duly exercised in 1976. It was pertinent to recall the General Assembly resolution providing that a dependent country could exercise its self-determination by opting for full independence, choosing freely to be associated with another State, or to be integrated into another State. It was regrettable that in its draft resolution of last year, the Sub-Commission did not see fit to make reference either to the 1976 act of self-determination by the East Timor people or the Assembly resolution referred to above.

Since East Timor had exercised the right to self-determination, Indonesia had done its best to ensure the development of that territory and to protect the fundamental freedoms of its people. In one year alone, Indonesia had earmarked $83 million for the development of East Timor. That was a lot more than the budgetary appropriation for any other Indonesian province, and showed the seriousness of the commitment of Indonesia to the development of East Timor. He hoped the Sub-Commission would be more impartial and balanced in future, and would ensure that it took decisions that would truly enhance the cause of fundamental freedoms and human rights.

F. FAVILA VIEIRA, observer from Portugal, said the East Timor question was indeed a very important issue. The General Assembly had called for consultations among the parties concerned, including Portugal, with a view to finding a solution to the problem. Portugal was committed to making its contribution to the success of those consultations.

In the meantime, the issue persisted and must not be forgotten. Claims that there had been an improvement in the situation were not credible. He reiterated Portugal's determination to respect its responsibilities under the relevant United Nations resolutions on East Timor.

LAKSHMI PURI, observer from India, recalling what she had said earlier in defence of her Government, stated that untouchability did not exist in India as a legal or administrative entity. It was not prevalent as a social trait or phenomenon in a country of 700 million people, where people of so many different communities lived side by side. Nobody was an untouchable in independent India.

The representative of the World Conference for Religion and Peace, she said, had alleged that her Government was inimical to religious conversions. That was not true. The Government of India was committed to a secular State

where all persons could believe, practise or preach any religion with equality and freedom without fear or favour. The Government did not interfere in any religious process, including conversions. The Government, however, had been often faced with the phenomenon of forced or forcible conversions, which impinged on the right of religious freedom of groups and persons. In those cases the Government had had to take action to protect the victims.

KONGIT SINEGIORGIS, observer from Ethiopia, referring to allegations made by the Anti-Slavery Society earlier, said the Society's statement was "unjustified and sweeping". It was also of an unsubstantiated nature.

It was true that a certain number of Ethiopian nationals were forced to seek sanctuary in Djibouti, she said, due to unprovoked aggression against her country by an expansionist neighbouring State. What was not true was the suggestion that the war was between Ethiopian forces and the so-called Somali Liberation Front. It was an uncontested fact that the fighting was conducted between Somalia and Ethiopia, and the whole world knew that her country was the victim of aggression.

It had been suggested that those refugees were unfriendly to the Ethiopian Government. That was not true. Before the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) began providing assistance, there had been a visible trend of spontaneous returnees from neighbouring countries into Ethiopia. Because of that influx her Government was faced with difficulties due to a lack of material resources to help receive and rehabilitate the returnees. Arrangements had been made for visits by United Nations officials, diplomats and journalists to areas where refugees were repatriated voluntarily and spontaneously. As a result of those measures, several thousand Ethiopians had already returned to their country, where a programme for returnees was currently being implemented under the joint responsibility of the Ethiopian Government, UNHCR and the League of Red Cross Societies.

Finally, she wished to assure the representative of the Anti-Slavery Society that there was no foul-play in the repatriation process. Further administrative, legal and other measures in order to facilitate the process of voluntary repatriations were being considered.

RAFIC KHOURI, representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), said the situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories and in Lebanon since 1967 was very serious. The adverse consequences on the Palestinians and other Arab populations were innumerable. Summary executions and the massacre of the Arabs were only one example of such consequences. Those acts had been condemned by the United Nations and in other forums as acts of genocide against the Arab people.

Another example was the refusal of Israel to respect the provisions of the Geneva Conventions, including its refusal to accord Palestinian combatants the status of prisoners of war.

Israel also insisted on its claim that occupation was no more than the liberation of land which historically belonged to Israel. That was used as a pretext to deny to the Palestinians their right to nationality. He hoped the

Sub-Commission would adopt a resolution reiterating the recognition by the world community of the Palestinians' right to self-determination.

JOSE LUIS LOVO CASTELAR, observer from El Salvador, said some of the statements in the debate were tendacious, unbalanced and constituted an interference in the internal affairs of his country. His Government's attitude was one of co-operation with United Nations bodies including the Working Group on Disappearances.

Continuing, he said the situation in El Salvador was a complex one, which had claimed thousands of victims. Some 2,000 members of the defence forces had been killed, and material damage amounting to some $600 million had been caused through acts of terrorism and sabotage.

In those circumstances, what El Salvador expected of the world community was positive support through appropriate measures, and not interference in its internal affairs. El Salvador, and other Central American countries in a similar situation, expected from the world community initiatives that were likely to lead to peaceful settlement of the subregion's problems. Unless that appeal was heeded, the conflict there would widen to engulf a bigger area, and develop into a fierce battle between East and West.

JULIO HEREDIA, observer from Cuba, thanking Mr. Ferrero, the expert from Peru, for his laudable remarks about Cuba earlier in the debate, said it was true that there was complete freedom of press in Cuba. That freedom was guaranteed under the Constitution. It was a right which was guaranteed, not merely by measures of a formal legal nature but also in practice. Workers had their own newspapers, and there was no law, decree or administrative measures to impose censorship on the press.

SALMAN BASHIR, observer from Pakistan, referring to his Government's intention to restore democracy, said elections to the local bodies would be held this year and followed by elections to the Provincial and National Assemblies and the Senate. The peaceful transfer of power by free and fair elections would be completed by 23 March 1985. Elections would be held on the basis of adult franchise. Women and minorities would enjoy full rights and martial law would be withdrawn.

Pakistan, he said, had on several occasions stated that it was firmly committed to the protection of the fundamental rights of all citizens including minorities. The minorities in Islam did not constitute an oppressed class. On the contrary, they enjoyed a privileged position. Pakistan denied the various unfounded allegations of arrests, torture and political persecution. The judiciary in Pakistan continued to perform its functions independently and without any interference.

EPHRAIM HARAN, observer from Israel, said some Sub-Commission experts had compared conditions in the Arab territories administered by Israel to Nazism. He did not expect from the experts such slander and disregard for historical facts.

Reference had also been made to the terrible happenings in the Sabra and Shatila camps in Lebanon, he said. Israel prided itself on being one of the few democracies in the Middle East where there was a rule of law. The Government had instituted a judicial inquiry into those events, and few countries had produced a report similar to the one which resulted from that inquiry.

Following objections by a number of Sub-Commission members who said Mr. Haran's remarks were couched in unacceptable language, the Chairperson, HALIMA WARZAZI, expert from Morocco, said serious criticism could be voiced in the discussion without the speaker going beyond the demands of courtesy. Thus, the observer from Israel, she stressed, could continue his intervention, bearing in mind the objection raised by Sub-Commission members.

Resuming his statement, Mr. HARAN recalled that the expert from Syria had said that the United Nations had adopted some 500 resolutions on the Middle East and that Israel had not complied with any of those resolutions. Those resolutions, Mr. Haran stated, included one, adopted by the General Assembly on 29 November 1947, which established the partition plan. The Jewish people accepted that resolution. However, the Arab High Committee rejected it. In addition, the 1947 resolutions were rejected by all the Arab States in the Middle East region. That information was set out in a document prepared for the forthcoming International Conference on Palestine.

TOSHIFUMI MINAMI, observer from Japan, referring to the repatriation of Koreans still residing on Sakhalin, said his Government had always had a strong interest in that problem, treating it as a humanitarian issue. However, Japan had renounced all rights, title and claim to southern Sakhalin in accordance with international law. Therefore, Japan had ceased to possess any legal means for securing the repatriation of Koreans residing on Sakhalin. Its ability to act in that matter was extremely limited.

AHMAD SAKER, expert from Syria, said the Sub-Commission was accustomed to the sort of intervention it had just heard from Israel. Israel's evil practices in the occupied territories were clear. For example, a child born of Palestinian parents in the occupied territories was registered as a child of anonymous or unknown nationality. Could the Sub-Commission members imagine a child and being characterized as of no known nationality? he asked.

FARHAD SHAHABI, observer from Iran, said United States President Ronald Reagan had supported the bombing of civilians in Iran and encouraged Arab States and France to assist in Iraq's aggression against Iran. The United States President had not raised a finger in protest against the events in the Sabra and Shatila camps or the situation in South Africa and Namibia. Why, he asked, did the same United States President rise in defence of the Baha'is in Iran? The selective attitude of the United States President could not be overlooked. Further, why were countries of Western Europe which had shown no concern for the massacre of the people of South Africa and Palestine so preoccupied with the Baha'is of Iran?

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It was easy to guess the reason for that contrast in attitudes, he said. The answer lay in the origins and evolution of Baha'ism in Iran. The seed was sown by imperialism and was being harvested today by the same imperialism.

Despite repeated explanations by Iran, he said, those opposed to Iran's revolution continued to use human rights forums to bring political pressure to bear on its Government, he said. Those who engaged in plots against the Islamic revolution deserved to be punished. In meting out that punishment, no distinction was made between Muslims and non-Muslims. All, including the Baha'is, were treated equally before the law.

His Government, he recalled, had extended an invitation earlier this year to the United Nations to send a visiting team to Iran to verify the human rights situation there. It had done so in good faith, expecting a positive response from the United Nations. No such positive response had been received by his Government, and Iran no longer looked forward to the visit.

Question of Slavery

The report of the Working Group on Slavery was introduced by ABU SAYEED CHOWDHURY, expert from Bangladesh, who this year was elected Chairman of the Group for the sixth consecutive term. Although slavery was abolished 150 years ago, he said, that practice still existed in subtle forms, affecting over 100 million people throughout the world. The United Nations should continue to use its influence to ensure the complete eradication of that phenomenon. He was pleased with the decision of Mauritania. He was particularly glad to see that country take a noble and straight-forward attitude in asking for the mission.

Mr. SAKER, expert from Syria, agreed with the Working Group's recommendations. The purpose of United Nations efforts in that field should be to assist the countries affected and not to apportion blame.

SYDNEY MOLIFI, representative of the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC), said the pass law system was one of the pernicious practices of the white racist minority regime in South Africa. The pass law was designed to channel cheap African labour to all sectors of the white economy, which was then dispensed with whenever it was no longer required. Through that system, the regime was able to control the daily movements of Africans, including the determination of where they might reside, and seek employment in urban or so-called white areas such as farms.

His organization wished to draw the Sub-Commission's attention to the lot of the black people under that system, and to appeal to it for action to assist in uprooting it.

JULIUS BOBINGER, observer from the Federal Republic of Germany, said his Government had carefully noted the contribution of the Anti-Slavery Society regarding child labour in his country, and would consider the matter within the context of its efforts to improve the conditions of migrant workers.

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PETER DAVIS, representative of the Anti-Slavery Society, said the decision of Mauritania regarding the situation in that country was a model for others to follow. He had been asked to accompany the Sub-Commission to Mauritania, and looked forward to assisting, in any way possible, the work of the team.

IRAN DOKHT, representative of the Anti-Slavery Society, referring to what she called Iranian "child soldiers", said thousands of Iranian children were sent to the front in the Iran-Iraq war to fight. They were between 13 and 18 years old and were sent there without any military training. Some 90 per cent were killed, and the rest were taken prisoners and held in camps in Iraq.

She appealed to the Sub-Commission to act to assist to stop the sending of more children to their death. The Sub-Commission should also send a mission to Iran and Iraq to study the question.

JALIL ZAHIRNIA, observer from Iran, referring to the allegations concerning "child soldiers", said if a country was under aggression it expected its citizens to defend it. In that regard, nobody should ask for the citizens' age, but the country had a right to simply call upon them to go to the front to defend their fatherland.

SYED MASUD, expert from India, agreed with the proposal that the Working Group's name should be changed to better reflect its true functions, which was to deal with slavery in all its forms and manifestations.

RIYADH AZIZ HADI, expert from Iraq, said that the Iraqi Government was ready to release the Iranian "children of war" without seeking any counterpart gain from Iran. That was Iraq's policy position, which it had repeatedly stated publicly.

MYRIAM SCHREIBER, representative of the International Federation of Abolitionists, said the indifference with which the continued existence of the scourge of slavery and slavery-like practices was accepted was disturbing. New practical measures should be initiated to implement United Nations recommendations on the subject.

BHAGWAN DAS, representative of the World Conference for Religion and Peace, said untouchability did not only exist in India. However, it was definitely the source of gross violations of the rights of that disadvantaged group. It was not by accident that that group was the source of recruitment for India's three worst social evils, namely eunuchs, sweepers and sanitary workers, and temple prostitution. While Pakistan had taken some legislative measures to eradicate those evils, although not with much success, India had done precious little.

ASBJORN EIDE, expert from Norway, also agreed with the proposal to change the name of the Working Group. The purpose of such a change should be to make obvious the widening of the scope of its work to cover various degrees of the denial of basic freedoms and slavery-like practices such as gross human exploitation and situations in which people were made dependent on subsistence means of livelihood.

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